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TRAVEL INFLUENCER ADVERTISEMENTS: A STUDY IN TURKEY

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to analyze the effect of perception of social media users on travel Influencer advertisements on attitude and destination. The questionnaire used for the research was administered to 836 participants. The data obtained from these questionnaires were interpreted by using the SPSS 25.0 and Lisrel 8.80 package software. Descriptive statistics, explanatory and confirmatory factor analysis and structural equation model were used to analyze the data. At the end of the research, the perception of social media users about travel Influencer advertisements was found to have an effect on attitudes and destination. According to the results of the hypothesis obtained using structural equation modeling, these factors are interrelated.

1. INTRODUCTION

The introduction of the internet into our lives has succeeded in bringing people together under a single platform. This platform is social media. Ryan and Jones (2009) announced social media as a web-based software that allows users to communicate and socially interact with each other using tools such as text, audio, visual, or video. Social media, whose number of users is increasing day by day, has managed to attract the attention of businesses to this market environment by bringing consumers together (Jaakonmaki, Müller and Brocke, 2017; Allalwan et al., 2017). Being aware of the low cost of social media and its ability to reach people directly, businesses made their advertisements (Kutthakaphan and Chokesamritpol, 2013; Bruhn, Schoenmuelle and Schafer, 2012; Khamis, Ang, and Welling, 2017; Evans, et al., 2017; Phua, Jin, and Kim, 2017), on this platform to promote their products or services. Although these ads appeal to some users, they disturb most consumers (Bambauer-Sachse and Mangold, 2011). Thus, most consumers either ignore these ads or use ad-blocking software (De Veirman, 2017).

Businesses have also used some advertising strategies to prevent this and to influence consumers (Apeyoje, 2013). This strategy is "Influencer" (Berg and Sterner, 2015) advertising, which has a large number of followers on social media and can influence many buyers with their ideas. Influencer advertising was initially applied in areas such as fashion-beauty- cosmetics (Konstantopoulou et al., 2019; Britt et al., 2020; Ananda and Wandebori, 2016; Achmad and Hidayat, 2018) and food-beverage (Folkvord et al., 2019; Coates et al., 2019) and later became one of the leading sectors in tourism (Gretzel, 2018; Femenia-Serra and Gretzel, 2020; Jang et al., 2021; Bakanauskas and Kisieliauskas, 2018; Chatzigeorgiou, 2017; Suciati, Maulidiyanti and Lusia, 2017; Ong and Ito, 2019).

Stating that there is a lack of research despite many kinds of research in Influencer advertising in the tourism and travel sector, Gretzel (2018), said that how consumers perceive travel and tourism social media influencers and what drives the persuasiveness of influencer messages are additional questions that need to be investigated. Besides, Cox et al. (2009) cited one of the most ambiguous and under-researched problems in the tourism industry as the role user- generated content plays in destination selection. In addition, although there are some studies on travel influencers (Gretzel, 2018; Kaur, 2018; Ay, et al., 2019; Yılmaz, 2020; Asan, 2021; Pop et al., 2021; Jang, et al., 2021), no research has been found that measures the perceptions, attitudes, and effects of travel influencers on their followers on destination selection. Based on this, the purpose of this research is to measure the effect of social media users' perceptions of travel influencer ads on attitude and destination selection. It is considered as an important study since such a study has not been done before.

This study is planned as follows: section 2 presents a review of the literature on social media and travel Influencer and travel Influencer Advertisements in the destination. Section 3 describes the research methodology. In section 4, the research findings and discussion are presented. Finally, in section 5, the

conclusions and implications of the research are given.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Social Media and Travel Influencer

Today, consumers have turned to the new media they produce instead of traditional media - such as newspaper, TV, radio- (Mangold and Faulds, 2009). They have influenced social media that provides two-way communication (Winer, 2009; Mayfield, 2008). The increase in the number of social media users has revealed social media influencers (Xu and Pratt, 2018).

Influencers are a new type of independent third-party promoters that influence their followers' attitudes using social media (Freberg et al., 2011). Although the Influencer is a new concept, various definitions have been made by researchers. Kotler and Armstrong (2012), on the other hand, define the concept of Influencer as influential people with broad networks that are chosen only to represent a company or a product as opinion leaders.

According to Ki (2018), the concept of influencer has been defined in the literature as "Influencer (Combley, 2011), Social Media Influencers (Freberg et al., 2011; Morgan, 2017; De Veirman et al., 2017), Instagram Influencers (Evans et al., 2017), Instagram Celebrities (Dewey 2014), Citizen Influencers (Bell, 2012), Micro Celebrities (Marwick, 2015; Abidin, 2016), Non-traditional celebrities (Scott, 2015).

Influencers provide a rapid spread of news or brands through their personal accounts in the social media environment (Tuten, 2008). According to Tuten (2008), Ed Keller and JonBerry suggested that Influencers should have 5 characters in TheInfluentials books. These are:
1. Be an activist,
2. Be a good communicator,
3. Should be able to affect people,
4. It must be mentally active,
5. Should be able to identify trends and spread them.

Xu and Pratt (2018) define travel influencers as the spokespersons of a tourism destination that contribute to the image of a region and influence the consumers' decision to choose a holiday destination (Guerreiro et al., 2019). Travel influencers inform their followers about topics related to the tourism sector (such as destination, culture, transportation, accommodation, food and beverage, entertainment). Influencers are seen as a reliable source of information by sharing their experiences with their followers instantly (Asan, 2021). In the literature, it is understood that the followers see travel influencers as a reliable source in their decision-making (Ay et al., 2019, Asan, 2021).

2.2.Travel Influencer Advertising in Destination

Consumers' perception of advertisements determines their attitudes towards advertisements. When consumers are confronted with any advertisements, their perception of advertisements (such as whether the advertisements are informativeness, seen as entertainment, perceived as reliability, the degree of good for economy, and whether it causes value corruption) is shaped. Then their attitude is determined (Wang et al., 2009). Accordingly, purchasing behaviors result either positively or negatively. The value of an advertisement is determined by the attitudes of consumers towards that advertisement and their behavior towards purchasing (Ducoffe, 1996).

This is the case with advertisements in the tourism sector. Before deciding on their vacation, consumers collect and analyze information about their destination from many places (Wang, Yu and Fesenmaier, 2002; Nezakati et al., 2015). At this stage, it is extremely important for tourism businesses to learn from where and how consumers seek holiday information (Cox, et al., 2009). Businesses can work with travel influencers to positively influence consumers' destination perceptions and finalize destination selection and attitudes (Glover, 2009; Femenia- Serra and Gretzel, 2020).

In order for the advertising campaign to reach the right audience, it is necessary to work with the right Influencer (Brown and Hayes, 2008). Influencers affect not only their own audience but also their own masses. Brown and Fiorella (2013) explain this situation with the "fisherman model". The fisherman model, first of all, to determine the fish to be caught (target audience), to choose the right water body (choosing the right environment such as Instagram, Youtube, Twitter), and waiting for the best result (spreading the advertisement) using the widest network (advertisement).

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Purpose of Research

The aim of this study is to measure the perceptions of social media users towards travel Influencer ads and their effect on their attitudes towards Influencer ads. It is also to reveal the effects of these attitudes on destination selection. In this study, the demographic characteristics of the participants were analyzed first. Secondly, the scale items that created the model were tested with factor analysis whether they were combined under certain factors and the factorization of the data was examined. Hypotheses formed in line with the model were analyzed using the Structural Equation Model (SEM).

3.2. Research Model and Hypothesis

In this study, firstly a theoretical model was developed in which social media users' perception of travel Influencer ads affects attitude and destination selection. The model is shown in figure 1.
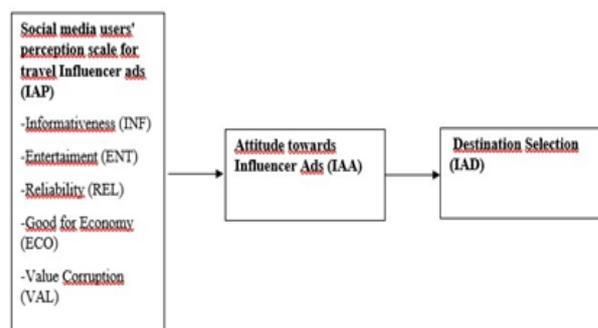

Figure 1: Research Model

As a result of the literature review, the following hypotheses were formed in accordance with the research.

H1: Perceptions of whether travel Influencer ads are informative on social media have a positive effect on the attitude towards travel Influencer ads.

H2: Perceptions about whether or not travel Influencer ads are fun on social media have a positive effect on the attitude towards Influencer ads.

H3: Perceptions of the reliability of travel Influencer ads on social media have a positive effect on the attitude towards Influencer ads.

H4: Perceptions about whether or not travel Influencer ads are good for the economy on social media have a positive effect on the attitude towards travel Influencer ads.

H5: Travel Influencer ads on social media have a negative impact on the perception of the degeneracy of society and youth on the attitude towards travel Influencer ads.

H6: The attitude towards travel Influencer ads on social media has a positive effect on destination selection.

3.3. Variables of Research

Factors, codes, numbers, and sources related to the scales used in the research are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Variables and Codes Used in Scales

Scale	Factor and Codes	The number of statements	Source
Social Media Users' Perception Scale for Travel Influencer Ads (IAP)	Informativeness (IAP1-IAP3)	3	Talih Akkaya (2013)
	Entertainment (IAP4-IAP7)	4	
	Reliability (IAP8-IAP10)	3	
	Good for Economy (IAP11-IAP13)	3	
	Value Corruption (IAP14-IAP15)	2	
Influencer ads attitude scale (IAA)	IAA1-IAA3	3	
Destination selection scale (IAD)	IAD1-IAD4	4	Erol and Hassan (2014)

As seen in Table 1, the perception scale has five factors and 15 expressions; the attitude scale consists of one factor and 3 expressions. There is also one factor 4 expression in the destination selection scale. The scales used in the questionnaire, the studies of Talih Akkaya (2013) and Erol and Hassan (2014) were used.

3.4. Research Sample and Data Collection Method

After YouTube in Turkey, Instagram is the most used app. While the number of Instagram users was 38 million in 2020, this number was 33 million in 2018 (https://wearesocial.com/). The study population was taken as the Instagram users in Turkey. Determining the number of samples has an effect on the statistical results (Hair et al., 2010). According to Bayram (2006), the sampling error was stated as 384 with a population size of 1,000,000 and above at the 95% confidence level. In this study, the sample size was determined as 841. Due to the limited time and cost available, the simple sampling method was chosen from non-random

sampling methods. Convenience sampling is a method that aims to select individuals who can give their information and data the easiest (Kurtuluş, 2010). The data in this study were collected by being applied an online questionnaire to Instagram users (n = 841) between January 1 and April 1, 2019. 836 usable questionnaires were obtained from these.

The questionnaire consisted of four sections and a total of 31 statements. In the first part, 9 statements were asked to measure the participants' demographic information, in the second part, 15 statements to measure their perceptions of Influencer ads, in the third part, 3 statements measuring the attitude of the users, and in the fourth part, a total of 4 statements were asked to measure the destination choices. Perception and destination scale the questionnaire prepared according to 5-point Likert Scale (Attitude = 1, Disagree = 2, Unstable = 3, Agree = 4, Strongly Agree = 5) attitude scale (1 = Very Bad-5 = Very Good, 1 = Dislike - 5 = Dislike, 1 = Not Required - 5 = Required). At the end of the research, the data collected from the questionnaires were analyzed using the SPSS 25.0 and Lisrel 8.80 statistical package programs.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Demographic Characteristics of Participants

The demographic characteristics of the participants were obtained by frequency analysis. According to the frequency analysis result, there are 836 participants in this study and 66.7% (558) of them were female. 65.2% (545) of the participants stated that they were between 14-24 years old and 51.7% (432) stated that they had undergraduate education. When the participants were asked about their professional groups, 46.4% (388) replied that they were students. Looking at the marital status of 836 participants, 84.4% (706) were single. When asked about the time spent on the internet for the participants of the study, 41.7% (349) stated that they spent between 2-4 hours. When asked about the frequency of visiting social networking sites daily, 59.8% (500) visited more than 7 times a day; 42.7% (357) of spending time on social networking sites stated that they spent between 2-4 hours. 78.3% (655) of the participants stated that the most frequently visited social networking site is Instagram.

4.2. Factor Analysis

In this study, the data were tested with the Explanatory Factor Analysis (EFA) using Varimax rotation and main component analysis methods, and whether they were factored.

According to the EFA, the scales consist of 3 dimensions: Perception scale for Influencer ads (IAP), Attitude towards Influencer ads (IAA), and destination selection scale (IAD). When Table 2 is examined, it is seen that the eigenvalues of reliability, value corruption, and good for economic factors are less than 1 because the factor number in the factor analysis is fixed to 5 in order to avoid deviation from the original scale. These five factors explained 80.312% of the total variance. In the study of Talih Akkaya (2013), the eigenvalue of informativeness factor was 6.854, the entertainment factor was

actor Loadings

	Factor Loading	Eigen- Value	Variance Explained (%)	Cumu Perce
a Users' perception scale for travel ads (IAP)				
eness (INF)		8.051	53.675	
ncer ads on social media are convincing.	0.801			
l media ads are reliable on social media.	0.791			
encer ads on social media are reasonable.	0.712			
encer ads on social media enhance our life	0.630			
ent (ENT)		1.709	11.390	
ncer ads on social media are funny.	0.852			
ncer ads on social media are enjoyable.	0.849			
ncer ads on social media are interesting.	0.713			
ncer ads on social media are pleasing.	0.703			
(REL)		0.891	5.942	
ncer's ads on social media provide relevant	0.791			
ncer ads on social media are a good source service information.	0.717			
ncer's ads on social media provide up-to-date	0.715			
uption (VAL)		0.799	5.329	
encer ads on social media degenerate the uth.	0.919			
encer ads on social media promote unwanted r society.	0.917			
conomy (ECO)		0.596	3.977	
encer ads on social media have a positive e economy.	0.790			
encer ads on social media about products for ill work better.	0.600			
f Attitude towards Social Media Users' uencer Ads		2.534	84.475	
ced (1)… Like (5)	0.935			
good (1)… Very good (5)	0.913			
ecessary at all (1)… 5)	0.910			
Selection Scale (IAD)		2.564	85.474	
affected by influencers' videos on social media y	0.948			
affected by photos taken by influencers on es on social	0.942			
affected by the comments that influencers holiday destinations on social media.	0.883			

Table 3: Cronbach Alpha, AVE (Average Variance Extracted), Composite Reliability & Discriminant Validity

	Alpha	CR	AVE	INF	ENT	REL	VAL	ECO	IAA	IAD
INF	0,907	0,909	0,714	0,845						
ENT	0,931	0,931	0,771	0,832	0,878					
REL	0,829	0,83	0,619	0,803	0,777	0,787				
VAL	0,817	0,88	0,798	0,036	0,059	0,073	0,893			
ECO	0,712	0,712	0,553	0,897	0,79	0,829*	0,146	0,744		
IAA	0,908	0,908	0,767	0,819	0,806	0,779*	-0,026	0,785	0,876	
IAD	0,915	0,913	0,779	0,549	0,538	0,562	0,001	0,632	0,623	0,882

1.723, the reliability factor was 1.458, the good for the economic factor was 1.439, and the value corruption factor was 1.192.

Total variances of related factors for this study are given in Table 2. As can be seen in Table 2, social media users' perception of Influencer advertisements was determined by five factors: informativeness (4 expressions), entertainment (4 expressions), reliability (3 expressions), value corruption (2 expressions), and good for the economy (2 expressions). When the eigenvalues of the IAA scale are examined, it is seen that the expressions combine under a single factor and have an eigenvalue greater than 1. This factor explains 84.475% of the total variance. When the eigenvalues of the IRD scale are examined, it is seen that all three expressions are collected under a single factor and the eigenvalues of this factor are above 1. The IRD scale explains 85.474% of the total variance.

Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) determines which factor is associated with which factor and which observed variable is related to which factor (Schmacker and Lomax, 2010). LISREL 8.80 statistical package program was used to determine the degree of suitability of variables to the default research model by applying CFA on the perceptions, attitude, and destination selection scales of the model social media users shown using EFA for travel Influencer ads.

As a result of the analysis, the reliability and validity of the scales were observed as shown in Table 3. The factors of IAP scale, composite reliability Cronbach's alpha (<0,70), CR (<0,60) and AVE (<0,50) values for IAA and IAD scales are above the limits in the literature (Altunışık, et al., 2005; Chiang and Hsieh, 2012; Cronbach, 1951; Fornell and Larcker, 1981; Karatepe, 2006; Lorcu, 2015; Yuruk, Akyol, and Simsek, 2017). For) Discriminant validity, diagonals consist of the square root of the AVE value. Correlation values below the diagonals are required to be smaller than the diagonal values (Fornell and Larcker 1981). When the values in Table 2 are examined, it is observed that the correlations under the diagonal of the REL factor are greater than the diagonal value. The reason for this is that while EFA is being performed, it is possible to factorize the scale, which was previously valid and reliable, based on the factor distribution, that is, it is possible to combine the expressions that combine in five factors in five factors and their eigenvalues are less than 1.

4.3. Testing of the Hypotheses

The research model and hypotheses were analyzed using SEM. Multivariate normality tests should be performed in order to apply SEM (Kayapınar, 2019). Mardia's Multivariate Normality test results for

variables are given in Table 4.

Table 4: Results of Mardia's Multivariate Normality Test
(Skewness and Kurtosis)

Mardia's multivariate skewness			Mardia's multivariate Kurtosis			Mardia's multivariate skewness and kurtosis	
Coefficient	Z	p-value	Coefficient	Z	p-value	X₂	p-value
52.746	51.261	0.000	719.940	33.514	0.000	3.750.824	0.000

Table 4 examined, p <0.05 multivariate normality of variables could not be achieved "Asymptotically Distribution-Free (ADF)" method (Kline, 2011). Therefore, an asymptotic covariance matrix has been formed as a priority in the testing of hypotheses since the variables do not provide normal distribution. SEM results were also calculated according to the asymptotic covariance matrix.

According to the SEM, Sattora-Bentler value was calculated as χ2= 497.69, the degree of freedom (df) = 191, p = 0.000, and RMSEA = 0.044. For the standardized solution (standardized coefficient) estimates in Figure 2, INF-IAA = 0.21, ENT-IAA = 0.28, REL-IAA = 0.21, ECO- IAA = 0.22, VAL-IAA = -0.09, IAA-IAD = 0.59 It was observed that the values. The whole model was examined using SEM. Based on the SEM, modification indices were applied between each of the following pairs: "IAP4- IAP7" and "IAA1-IAA3" The error variances of "IAP15" were taken as "0". Since the path diagram is P <0.05, the model is significant.

When the model fix index values of SEM are examined, it is understood that the fit indices are within the limits of fit. RMSEA = 0.044, CFI = 0.99, NFI = 0.99, NNFI = 0.99 and AGFI =0.91 compliance goodness values are "good fit"; χ2/df = 2.606, GFI = 0.93, RMR = 0.086 and SRMR = 0.051 are in the "acceptable fit" range.

When the regression coefficient t-values and the results of the hypotheses in Table 5 are considered, it is seen that the t-values of the hypotheses are greater than 1.96 and thus the hypotheses are supported. It has been revealed that social media users have the same and direct effect on the perception scale of travel Influencer ads with informativeness, entertainment, reliability, and good for economy factors and attitude scale, and have a direct and negative effect on value corruption. It was also found that the attitude scale had a direct effect on the destination selection scale.

Table 5: Structural Equation Results

Structural Relations	Hypothesis	Estimates	T-Value
INF→IAA	H1 → accepted	0.21	3.19
ENT→IAA	H2 → accepted	0.28	6.11
REL→IAA	H3 → accepted	0.21	2.38
ECO→IAA	H4 → accepted	0.22	2.08
VAL→IAA	H5 → accepted	-0.09	-3.76
IAA→IAD	H6 → accepted	0.59	15.40
Structural equations			**R2**
IAA = 0.21*REL + 0.28*ENT + 0.21*INF- 0.095*VAL + 0.22*ECO IAD = 0.59*IAA			0.74 0.35

In the structural equation in Table 5, there is the same way and direct relationship between attitude (IAA) and reliability (REL), entertainment (ENT),

informativeness (INF), good for economy (ECO), and regression coefficients were found to be 0.21 for GUV. While ENT was 0.28, INF was 0.21, and ECO was 0.22, there was an inverse relationship between IRT and value corruption (VAL) and the regression coefficient for VAL was 0.095. The sub-dimensions of the perception scale explained 0.74 of the attitude scale at 5% significance level and 26% of the attitude scale. It is seen that there is a direct and direct relationship between IAA and IAD and the regression coefficient for IAD is 0.59. The IAA explains 0.35 of the IRD at 5% significance level, while 65% does not.

5. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Examining the demographic characteristics of the participants, it was found that the data obtained were in accordance with the analysis. For the purpose of the study, factor analysis was performed to determine the validity and reliability of the variables without losing their characteristics and to make them suitable for SEM. As a result of this, explanatory factor analysis was conducted to determine whether the scales were factored or not and to determine their structural validity. Afterward, confirmatory factor analysis was applied to the variables to be factored in order to determine whether they validated the related factor.

In order to test the hypotheses formed on the study, SEM was used to examine the relationship between multiple variables with the help of models. Accordingly, if the t value of the regression coefficient is greater than 1.96, the hypotheses are considered to be supported. It was revealed that the perception scale of social media users, defined with regard to information efficiency, entertainment, reliability, and good for the economy, has the same and direct effect between attitude and attitude towards travel Influencer advertisements, and the direct and negative effects of corruption on value. In addition, the direct effect of the attitude scale on the destination selection scale was determined and it was found that the hypotheses were supported by the literature and generally similar results were obtained (Xu and Pratt, 2018; Magno and Cassia, 2018; Guerreiro et al., 2019; Ay, et al., 2019; Asan, 2021; Pop, et al., 2021).

The hypotheses created for the SEM are as follows: Traveling on social media as a result of the analysis conducted to determine whether the perceptions about whether or not Influencer ads are informative to have a positive effect on the attitude towards Influencer ads, the regression coefficient between the information giving factor and attitude is 3.19. Since the t-value of the regression coefficient was greater than 1.96, there was no positive effect on perceptions of informativeness on the attitude towards Influencer ads.

Since the t-value of the regression coefficient was greater than 1.96, the perceptions of informativeness had a positive effect on the attitude towards Influencer ads, thus supporting the H1 hypothesis. Traveling on social media as a result of the analysis conducted to determine whether the perceptions of whether Influencer ads are fun or not, had a positive effect on the attitude towards Influencer ads, the H2 hypothesis was supported as the regression value between entertainment and attitude was 6.11. The t-value of the regression coefficient between

reliability and attitude was found to be 2.38. Accordingly, it was concluded that the perception of whether the travel Influencer ads are reliable on social media has a positive effect on the attitude towards Influencer ads, thus supporting the H3 hypothesis.

As a result of the analysis conducted to determine whether perceptions about whether Influencer ads are good for the economy to have a positive effect on the attitude towards Influencer ads, the regression coefficient between the good for the economy and attitude was determined as 2.08, and the H4 hypothesis was supported. Travel on social media As a result of the analysis conducted to determine whether the perceptions of the degeneration of society and youth about the value of the Influencer ads had a negative effect on the attitude towards Influencer ads, the t value of the regression coefficient between the degeneration and the attitude was found to be

-3.76. Therefore, the perceptions of value corruption was proven to have a negative effect on attitude and the H5 hypothesis is supported.

As a result of the analysis conducted to determine whether the attitude towards travel Influencer advertisements had a positive effect on destination selection, the t value of the regression coefficient between the attitude and destination selection was determined as 15.40. Thus, it was found that the attitude towards travel Influencer ads had an effect on destination selection and the H6 hypothesis was supported. According to the results of the analysis, the importance of travel Influencer ads on social media was revealed. In general, it is seen that social media users' perceptions about travel Influencer ads have an effect on attitudes and destination selection.

The research has been limited to Instagram users since the use of Instagram is more common in recent years than other social networks, and other networks have been excluded. The data can be collected over users who use other social networking sites and the results can be generalized.

Some recommendations for businesses are listed so that social media users can work with Influencers, which affect their perceptions, attitudes, and destination choices. First of all, businesses need to have social media accounts and use them actively in order to be visible in social media and to be immediately accessible by their consumers. Businesses should choose the social networking site according to their target audience. Businesses should choose the right Influencer for the right audience to create more effective advertising.

The influencers to be selected should be analyzed according to their potency rather than the number of followers. Each Influencer has his/her own language. They know how, where, and with what messages they can influence their followers. Therefore, businesses should not interfere with Influencer advertising languages. Businesses should establish close relationships with influencers and never forget that they are bridges between businesses and consumers. They should assist Influencers with the products or services to be promoted and give them as gifts.

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